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SUBJECT: WHERE THE STREETS HAVE NO NAME: MAIL DELIVERY IN JORDAN TO
BENEFIT FROM STREET NAMING PROJECT

REF: Amman 815

¶1. (U) Summary: Historically, Amman has had an underdeveloped street naming and numbering system that has forced businesses to develop independent mapping systems based on landmarks. The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) is actively verifying that all Amman streets have names; confirming that street numbers are unique; and is installing building numbers and street signs. These developments should allow the post office, the Jordan Post Company (JPC), to offer home delivery of mail and expand its current services. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Marwan Elayyan, Director of the Naming and Numbering Department within GAM, told EconOff that until recently Amman was a small town that could exist without street names or rely on descriptions like "the hill that goes to Ayesha's house." Even today, Jordanians do not use addresses in describing where they live and or a desired destination, but instead rely on landmarks. Elayyah said a 1970's United Nations street numbering project resulted in 50 separate buildings with the same address: two Zahran Street. This lack of street names in common usage has had negative economic implications, the largest being that there is currently no home delivery of mail.

UNDERDEVELOPED ADDRESS SYSTEM SENDS COMPANIES TO CLIENTS

¶3. (U) Faraj Baseel, Country Manager of the transportation company Aramex, said that his company makes approximately 2,000-3,000 deliveries in Jordan daily. Aramex has developed a 700,000 name database for Jordan, which Baseel estimated was second in size only to that of the Jordanian phone company. Baseel said the database uses street addresses when available, but also includes local landmarks such as mosques and schools to help drivers find individual homes and buildings. Baseel said that his company attempts to use business addresses for delivery whenever possible because they are easier to find. He added that his most common deliveries are credit cards, mobile phone bills, and passports with newly issued visas. Rawa Mirza, Communications Director for the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) which regulates all mail services, said that Aramex is second only to JPC in volume of international mail delivery. Mirza noted that in 2006, 22 million JPC shipments were made, an average of less than four letters per person.

¶4. (U) DHL Country Operations Manager Mazen Saba explained that DHL has also developed its own database and insists on a local phone number in order to retrieve additional directions, as needed. Marwan Hejazen, Country Commercial Officer for DHL, noted that although Jordan's address system is under-developed, the need for accurate addresses in the Middle East is less than in the U.S. because there is far less mail and people end up paying bills in cash and in-person.

15. (U) Khalil Al Alami, CEO of International Cards Company (ICC) - Jordan's independent issuer of MasterCard credit cards - said that his company uses neither JPC nor one of the private delivery services to deliver credit cards or monthly bills due to security concerns and a lack of a safe governmental mail system. Instead, the majority of his customers make their payments in-person. While ICC has offices in malls and at local universities, it will send representatives to meet customers on a monthly basis at a place of the customers' choosing - i.e., at home, at work, at a coffee shop, etc., - to accept payment, which is most typically made in cash. Similarly, officials from two archaeology non-profit organizations said that they make all mail deliveries in-person, because the JPC is too unreliable and the express delivery services like Aramex are too expensive for newsletters and announcements.

STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING PROJECT MAKES ADVANCES

16. (SBU) While the GAM naming and number office has existed for decades, the office began serious efforts in 2006 to ensure that all streets were named, buildings had a unique street number, and building numbers and street names were visible. Elayyan said that all 9,000 streets in Amman are now named, with most major streets named after members of the royal family. Elayyan expressed frustration that the royal family's complete names must be used (i.e., King Abdullah the Second Bin Hussein Street), since this forces the sign-maker to use a small font which impairs readability.

Other streets in Amman have been named after deceased dignitaries, martyrs, birds, plants, sister cities such as Chicago and Miami, and other Arab cities. Elayyan said streets in Amman are named rather than numbered, because the hilly city is not on a grid system.

17. (U) Elayyan said that the Amman signage project started actively in January 2008 and should take 12 - 15 months to implement at the cost of \$14-17 million. The project involves putting large, visible

blue numbers on buildings and placing poled street signs at 40,000 intersections. The project is about 10 percent complete, with a significant number of buildings numbered, particularly in West Amman, and the first 100 intersection signs erected in March 2008.

18. (U) Elayyan admitted that the next challenge will be to increase the common knowledge and use of street addresses, as most Amman residents only know the major street names. He met with city officials to discuss giving cab drivers address tests, but received significant pushback given the number of illiterate drivers. Although many delivery companies have begun entering the new names and numbers in their databases, one DHL representative commented that Dubai's similar efforts have been faster and more successful.

JORDAN POST'S SERVICES TODAY

19. (SBU) One of the beneficiaries of GAM's efforts should be the Jordan Post Company, a public shareholding company completely owned by the Government of Jordan. JPC's services are provided through local post offices which provide mail and package services. Ahmad Obeidat, Deputy General Manager of JPC, said there are 356 post offices in Jordan. He explained that all towns with 2,000 or more residents have a post office, and that smaller towns may have a post office if they are the largest town in a region. Mirza said that in addition to postal services, the JPC accepts payments for telephone, water and electricity bills; university applications; passport renewals; and telegrams. Obeidat explained that these services are provided via a contract with associated ministries. He said that ministries want to use the post office to provide such services because of its nation-wide reach. National Aid Fund (NAF) General Manager Dr. Mahmoud Al-Kafawin said that aid disbursements are made at local post offices, because "it is the best way for the people - not the best way for the National Aid Fund." He added that his organization has talked to banks and debit card companies, but said that banks do not have rural locations like JPC. Mirza noted that in 2006, 900 thousand NAF disbursements were made, the majority using JPC (reftel).

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS: JORDAN POST IN THE FUTURE

¶10. (SBU) JPC has been slated for privatization since 2002, but efforts have only recently been revitalized with the investment bank and consulting firm Lazard LTC currently examining the company's potential value. In the meantime, Obeidat's goal is to make JPC the "logistics arm for the government." He said JPC's capabilities were recently demonstrated when it distributed 200,000 subsidized housing applications in five days, as part of a new government program. Going forward, he is eager to offer all personal government services, such as car registration, drivers' licenses, and foreign worker permits. Obeidat said that in 2007, the JPC broke even, but he expects a profit in 2008. He predicted profitability will only come from a growing number of contracts with other ministries. He admitted that his 200 rural post offices will never be profitable, but will always be subsidized by urban ones.

¶11. (U) Mirza and Obeidat were optimistic about the potential for the street naming project to improve the quality and type of services offered by JPC. Both said the GAM project must be completed before home delivery of mail can be piloted. Obeidat explained that JPC has been working closely with GAM and together they are promoting a law requiring mailboxes in all multi-family dwellings. He said that a home mail delivery pilot will likely start in Aqaba in early 2009, and Amman could follow later that year.

COMMENT

¶12. (U) In many ways, Amman believes it is a small town, and Jordanians lament the rapid growth of the city. Blogs that mentioned the street naming project said that the funds could be better spent elsewhere and that the official names will compete with the vernacular ones. A systematic street naming system, while a symbol of the city's growth, may be of greatest benefit to foreign investors, the nascent direct mail advertising sector, and tourists. A logical system will make it easier to operate in Amman and lead the capital closer to the goal espoused by Elayyan: "A livable city is an organized city with a soul."

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